SNAP Employment and Training

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Washington's Basic Food Employment & Training Program (BFET)

Lavanya Mohan

SNAP Employment & Training (E&T) is an important component of SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, formerly known as the Food Stamp Program) that supports a variety of education, training, employment, and related services for SNAP recipients. It gives recipients opportunities to gain skills, training, or experience that will improve their employment prospects and reduce their reliance on SNAP benefits. Moreover, it may help SNAP recipients meet program work requirements.[1]

Using funds allocated from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Food and Nutrition Service (FNS), all states are required to operate SNAP E&T programs. Washington State's Basic Food Employment and Training (BFET) is one of the most robust SNAP E&T programs in the country and is an important part of the state's comprehensive workforce development system.

Launched in 2005, BFET is a public-private partnership wherein investments made by state and local government and philanthropy collaborate to leverage additional federal SNAP E&T funding to provide job search and training services to recipients of SNAP (known as Basic Food in Washington). It therefore increases the resources available to community colleges, as well as service providers known as community-based organizations (CBOs).[2] The initial pilot program was the first in the nation to use non-governmental (third-party) spending to provide the non-federal portion of the 50-50 SNAP E&T reimbursement funding.[3] Fifty percent of any allowable expenses incurred by a third-party contractor participating in the BFET program is reimbursed by FNS through the E&T program.[4] Currently, the program includes all 34 of Washington's community and technical colleges and 33 participating community-based organizations in 18 counties.[5]

The program is available to SNAP recipients who are not participating in the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) WorkFirst program.[6] The goal of BFET is to provide services to low-income individuals and displaced workers to encourage financial independence and employment. BFET is operated on a voluntary basis. While nonexempt able-bodied adults without dependents (ABAWDs) are not required to participate in BFET, by doing so they may be able to meet the work requirements to be eligible for SNAP benefits beyond

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[1] Helly Lee, *SNAP Works: SNAP Work Requirements and Time Limits*, CLASP, June 2013, http://www.clasp.org/resources-and-publications/files/SNAP-Work-Requirements-and-Time-Limits-ABAWD.pdf.

[2] *Focus: Washington State; Beyond the Headlines, At a Glance: Jobs, Workers & the Economy*, Seattle Jobs Initiative, June 2013, http://www.seattlejobsinitiative.com/wp-content/uploads/BeyondHeadlines_JUNE2013.pdf.

[3] For an explanation of the funding streams under SNAP E&T, see box on page 3, or for more detail, see Elizabeth Lower-Basch, *SNAP E&T*, CLASP, March 2014, http://www.clasp.org/resources-and-publications/publication-1/SNAP-ET-Overview.pdf.

[4] *Basic Food Employment and Training Grant Guidance 2012-13*, Washington State Board for Community & Technical Colleges, February 2012, http://www.sbctc.ctc.edu/college/workforce/2012-13BFETGuidance.pdf.

[5] "Current BFET Providers Scope of Services," Washington State Basic Food Employment and Training, http://www.basicfoodet.org/current-partners.

[6] *Basic Food Employment and Training (BFET): ORIA BFET Contractor Procedures Handbook*, Washington State Department of Social and Health Services, January 15, 2013, http://www.tracassoc.com/staffwebsite/TRACStaff/BFET_files/ORIA%20BFET%20Contractor's%20Handbook%20(1-15-13)-1.pdf. Federal law prohibits use of SNAP E&T funds to serve TANF recipients.

three months.[7] SNAP recipients initially learn about the BFET program through SNAP case workers or through community colleges and CBOs.[8] In some cases, TANF applicants who decide not to receive TANF cash assistance are also provided details about the BFET program.

BFET services include job search, job search training, educational services, skills training, and support services, all of which are provided through community or technical colleges and CBOs.[9] Participants are also eligible for support services such as transportation assistance, child care, and clothing assistance. While many providers offer wrap-around support services, some offer only certain services or limit them to certain categories. However, providers are permitted to share participants through co-enrollment, which allows participants to continue to receive a wider range of wrap-around services. For example, training activities may be provided by a community college, while a CBO partner may offer case management, job search, and job retention services.[10]

Participation in the program begins when the case manager at a community college or CBO assesses the BFET participant's career goals, skills, abilities, family obligations, and any other job-relatable assets and barriers, recommending steps that will help participants overcome identified career barriers. Then, the case manager works with the applicant to develop a written Individual Employment Plan (IEP) and employability assessment specific to the applicant's identified interests and needs.[11]

With an emphasis on basic education and vocational training, the program helps participants improve skills to secure better-paying jobs and achieve self-sufficiency. The majority of BFET participants take part in vocational education activities, with about a fifth participating in job search and another fifth receiving and participating in multiple services. Additionally, about 8 percent participate in basic education, with about 1 percent in GED and/or high school programs and another 1 percent participating in job readiness activities.[12]

SNAP recipients who participate in BFET by pursuing vocational education through community colleges must also apply for other tuition assistance, such as Pell and state financial aid grants. BFET provides financial assistance to address participants' unmet need in covering tuition and associated costs. BFET can provide funding for an Associate's degree and/or certificate programs. After completion of the degree or certificate program, the BFET participant is expected to secure employment.[13]

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[7] Jason Turner, e-mail communication. Washington's BFET program is not mandatory for SNAP recipients. The state currently has a waiver of the ABAWD time limits due to high unemployment rates. For more information on rules pertaining to ABAWDs , please see "Basic Food Work Requirements - ABAWDs (Able-Bodied Adults Without Dependents)," Washington State Department of Social and Health Services, http://www.dshs.wa.gov/manuals/eaz/sections/FoodAssistanceWorkReq/BFETabawds.shtml and http://www.clasp.org/resources-and-publications/files/SNAP-Work-Requirements-and-Time-Limits-ABAWD.pdf.

[8] Jason Turner, e-mail communication, May 15, 2014.

[9] Washington State Basic Food Employment and Training, http://www.basicfoodet.org/current-partners.

[10] *Basic Food Employment & Training (BF E&T) Program Partner Manual Contractor HANDBOOK*, Washington State Board for Community & Technical Colleges, July 1, 2013, http://www.sbctc.ctc.edu/college/workforce/BFETHandbook07-01-13Final.pdf and "BFET Capacity Checklist," Washington State Basic Food Employment and Training, http://www.basicfoodet.org/current-partners.

[11] Washington State Board for Community & Technical Colleges, *Basic Food Employment & Training (BF E&T) Program Partner Manual Contractor HANDBOOK*.

[12] Seattle Jobs Initiative, *Focus: Washington State; Beyond the Headlines, At a Glance: Jobs, Workers & the Economy*.

[13] "Basic Food and Employment Training: Frequently Asked Questions," Edmonds Community College, http://www.edcc.edu/BFET/faq.html and Turner, e-mail communication.

Contractors are required to report participation hours and non-participation occurrences of BFET participants.[14] For all BFET participants, attendance must be documented for job search and skills education and training activities.[15] Additionally, contractors must provide participant progress notes on a monthly basis and submit quarterly summary reports. After completion of the training program, verification of a participant's part-time or full-time employment, as well as support and retention services, must also be documented. Additionally, support services must be closely tracked.[16]

BFET participants complete community and technical college degrees and certificates, earning college credentials in key local industry sectors. Many participants secure not just jobs but entry points to careers, earning $4,100 more on average annually than they did prior to entering the program. Even during the worst of the Great Recession, BFET participants were 33 percent more likely to be employed than other individuals receiving SNAP benefits who were able to work but did not participate in employment and training activities.[17]

Since the program's inception, the number of participants in BFET has grown tenfold. And its strong success has generated legislative support for expansion. In 2010, the Washington legislature passed the Security Lifeline Act

Overview of SNAP E&T

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Employment and Training (SNAP E&T) funds can be used to support education, training, employment, and related services for SNAP recipients.

To participate in SNAP E&T, an individual must be a recipient of SNAP benefits and not Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). The majority of SNAP recipients are either working—but earning so little that they still qualify for benefits—or are not expected to be employed, mostly due to age or disability. Working-age SNAP recipients who are not employed and do not qualify for an exemption must meet certain requirements.

SNAP E&T includes two main types of funding: 100 percent federal funds and 50 percent federal reimbursement funds. Each state receives a share of the total funds appropriated for 100 percent funding ($79 million in FY 2014), based on a formula that takes into account the number of SNAP recipients who could potentially participate in E&T services. In addition, states can claim 50 percent reimbursement for non-federal spending on SNAP E&T activities on an uncapped basis.

States may operate voluntary or mandatory SNAP E&T programs—or a combination—and may limit eligibility to certain types of SNAP recipients or to those who live in certain areas. SNAP E&T funds can support operating costs of job search, work experience, education and training programs, support services for participants, and job retention services for up to 90 days. Additional activities may be allowed under new pilot projects authorized under the Farm Bill. For more information, see *SNAP E&T*, available at *http://www.clasp.org/resources-and-publications/publication-1/SNAP-ET-Overview.pdf*.

[14] Contractors are required to check BFET eligibility and complete case management notes on a monthly basis. Contractors track non-participation occurrences for case management and monthly billing purposes. Because BFET is operated on a voluntary basis, contractors do not have to report non-participation for the purpose of SNAP disqualification but do need to ensure they are not billing for individuals that have dropped out of BFET. Although drop-outs are not disqualified from receipt of food assistance, they could be disqualified from BFET participation in the future. Robert L. Thibodeau, e-mail communication, May 28, 2014.

[15] Community colleges and CBOs must maintain intake, assessment, and client eligibility documents as well as individual training/employment plans. These third-party contractors may also reference an existing training/employment plan established by a co-enrollment partner.

[16] Support services can include copies of ticket and bus pass issuance or logs; copies of receipts for all other support services such as books and supplies, clothing, tools; and other justifiable resources. Washington State Board for Community & Technical Colleges, *Basic Food Employment & Training (BF E&T) Program Partner Manual Contractor HANDBOOK* and Washington State Basic Food Employment and Training, "BFET Capacity Checklist."

[17] John Kim, "Employment and Training Program at Risk," The Hill, September 24, 2013, http://thehill.com/blogs/congress-blog/economy-a-budget/324029-employment-and-training-program-at-risk.

(HB 2782), expanding BFET by adding a new college, building on programs in already participating colleges, and investing new resources in the CBO-college partnership in providing support services.[18]

By The Numbers

- **Year started:** 2005[19]
- **Approximate number of active participants:** As of December 2013, a cumulative 53,000 people had been served.[20] An estimated 10 percent of eligible Washington SNAP recipients participate in BFET every year.[21]
- **Annual cost:** As of FY 2013, $29.9 million[22]
- **Performance Measures:** Data collected on program outcomes between 2007 and 2011 showed nearly 60 percent of participants employed one year after exiting the program, while nearly 70 percent were employed two years after exiting the program. As of December 2013, BFET has an average 70-80 percent participant completion rate and an overall 60 percent employment rate. Participants who secure employment receive an overall median wage of $11.00 per hour. Participants that received vocational training saw a higher median wage of $11.44 per hour.[23]

Crucial Innovations

BFET has spurred colleges and community agency partnerships. BFET is an example of collective impact. With a shared goal of helping SNAP recipients achieve self-sufficiency, community colleges and CBOs are partnering to provide wrap-around services to participants to decrease barriers in education and employment.

Participants engage in vocational training that addresses the local skills gap. BFET partners and providers have developed vocational curricula that allows participants to gain skills that are in demand for jobs in local economies. This allows participants to become gainfully employed soon after the completion of their skills training program and transition off of SNAP benefits.

BFET tracks outcomes for participants through streamlined tracking between Washington's Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) and its contractors. Participant documentation and progress is tracked within the DSHS Electronic Jobs Automated System (eJAS) database and partner agency's case management systems.[24] This allows DSHS to track specific services and outcomes for

[18] While HB2782 proposed adding three new colleges, due to FNS ruling in 2011 on fiscal guidance that restricted BFET program costing, this was reduced to adding only one new college. See David Kaz, Memo to the City of Seattle Office of Economic Development, *Basic Food Employment & Training Advocacy: Final Report on 2010 Activities*, Seattle Jobs Initiative, November 2010.
[19] Seattle Jobs Initiative, *Focus: Washington State; Beyond the Headlines, At a Glance: Jobs, Workers & the Economy*.
[20] Washington State Department of Social and Health Services, "Washington's Basic Food Employment & Training Program (BFE&T)" PowerPoint.
[21] Turner, e-mail communication.
[22] Washington State Department of Social and Health Services, "Washington's Basic Food Employment & Training Program (BFE&T)" PowerPoint.
[23] Seattle Jobs Initiative, *Focus: Washington State; Beyond the Headlines, At a Glance: Jobs, Workers & the Economy* and Washington State Department of Social and Health Services, "Washington's Basic Food Employment & Training Program (BFE&T)" PowerPoint.
[24] Washington State Basic Food Employment and Training, "BFET Capacity Checklist," and Washington State Board for Community & Technical Colleges, *Basic Food Employment & Training (BF E&T) Program Partner Manual Contractor HANDBOOK*.

participants. BFET is one of few SNAP E&T programs that track specific participant outcome data, such as employment rates and average employment wages. Tracking this crucial data can inform decisions on improving and expanding BFET services.

Challenges

While BFET has been a widely successful program, its growth has been slowed by changes in guidance and limits to the scope of services.

There are limits to the scope of BFET. BFET funding does not cover 4-year college, on the job training (OJT) wages, work experience, paid work experience, or stipends provided in certain training programs.[25] These activities could further assist in improving BFET participants' skills, leading to gainful employment and self-sufficiency.

Confusion regarding cost principles temporarily slowed BFET program growth. Prior to a 2011 clarification of allowable costs, community colleges charged to the program the full cost of instruction of a BFET participant. In 2011, FNS clarified that SNAP E&T may not be charged for services that are generally available without charge to non-participants and may not be charged more for services than other purchasers. This had the potential to limit program growth, as community college advertised tuition is often less than the full cost of instruction. At the same time, FNS clarified that 100 percent federal E&T funds could be used to pay for tuition. (Prior to that, the colleges had believed that tuition, like child care and transportation, could only be charged against the 50/50 reimbursement funding.) For the past three years, Washington has received additional funding from 100 percent federal E&T carry-over funds that other states did not use, allowing BFET to serve additional SNAP recipients.

[25] Washington State Basic Food Employment and Training, "BFET Capacity Checklist."

For More Information

Read

A new report from Seattle Jobs Initiative provides an in-depth "insider's" account of Basic Food Employment and Training (BFET). This research explains in detail how BFET was developed and brought rapidly to scale; how it is administered; how it is being utilized by community colleges and community agencies to expand skills training; program challenges; and best practices. The over-arching objective of the report is to provide information to help spur well-considered expansion of SNAP E&T programs by other states and localities, supporting employment and training services that lead many more low-income people to advance out of poverty. The report can be accessed here: http://www.seattlejobsinitiative.com/wp-content/uploads/SJI_BFET_June2014.pdf

Visit

http://www.basicfoodet.org/

Contact

Robert L. Thibodeau
Lead Program Manager – Food Assistance Programs
Washington State Department of Social
and Health Services
(360) 725-4634 or (360) 501-2411
thiborl@dshs.wa.gov

Jason Turner
Food Program Manager
Washington State Department of Social
and Health Services
(360) 725-4640 or (425) 673-3283
TurneJM@dshs.wa.gov

David Kaz
Director of Policy & Communications
Seattle Jobs Initiative
(206) 628-6986
DKaz@seattlejobsinit.com